AIM EDUCATION IN CRISIS
A Socialist View

August, 1980 American Independent Movement NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

Education: The History of the Struggle

Public education has always involved a struggle between the needs of the mass of people and those of the propertied class. By propertied class we mean capitalists, those who own and control the large corporations and thereby most of the profits produced in our economy. The struggle over education has shaped every aspect of the educational process: what should be taught; to which people; for how many years; and in what particular ways. The continuing struggle over education is constantly altered under the impact of changing economic, political and cultural forces throughout our society.

1. **Free public education for everyone paid for by taxes levied mainly upon the propertied class.**
2. **Education in the particular skills needed to find and hold good jobs that would allow children to "do better" than their parents.**
3. **Education also in all the arts and sciences of modern civilization, in the full richness of our culture, that would allow every child an equal opportunity to discover and develop his/her talents and interests.**
4. **Education in the political knowledge and skills needed to understand and fight the broad interests of the mass of Americans—economic, political and cultural interests.**

At different times in our history, the working class has emphasized one or another of these goals according to the conditions of its struggles with the propertied class.

The propertied class, on the other hand, has maintained for a long time certain goals of its own for public school education:

1. **Education that stresses the belief that the current distribution of wealth, power and privilege in America is natural, necessary and fair, the result of basic and unchangeable differences in human nature and ability.**
2. **Education that limits the mass of Americans to that minimum level of skills needed to fill the quantity and quality of jobs which the propertied class needs to maintain its profits and its dominant social position.**
3. **Education that offers a full program of arts and sciences as well as basic skills to a selected group of "special" or "elite" children who are expected to take over the commanding positions in the society. This selected group tends to be almost exclusively the children of the propertied class itself.**
4. **Free public education paid for by taxes levied mainly upon the working class itself.**

The current crisis of public education is one tense moment in the ongoing struggle between the working and propertied classes. The 1960s were years when that struggle tilted towards the working class and its goals for public education. Mass movements for civil rights, for equality for women, for affirmative action were effective forces that won some demands from the public school system. The links between these movements and the anti-Vietnam war efforts gave them added influence throughout the country since the propertied class recognized that fighting a war abroad requires some minimal concessions to unity at home.

In addition to the mass movements among the working class, the propertied class too had its own reasons for making certain concessions in the struggle for public education. The competition with the Soviet Union that was heated up by the shock of Sputnik in the late 1950's produced a sudden pressure for more scientific workers. The public school system, in part, was called upon to meet this need. The high employment of the Vietnam War-heated economy added further pressure. Finally, to meet some of the demands of the mass movements, it was necessary to provide a large number of newly educated social workers, teachers and supportive staff for the many community programs set up all over the country. The propertied class looked to public education to produce those workers.

Victories of the 1960's Short Lived

To meet some of the demands of domestic mass movements, to fight an unpopular war, to compete better with the Soviet Union, the propertied class did two things: 1. It provided additional funds, through the tax system, to public education; 2. It permitted educational institutions some unusual freedom to expand and develop new programs and methods in order to perform the tasks expected of them. In this situation, working class goals for public education could and did make considerable headway inside nearly all American educational institutions.

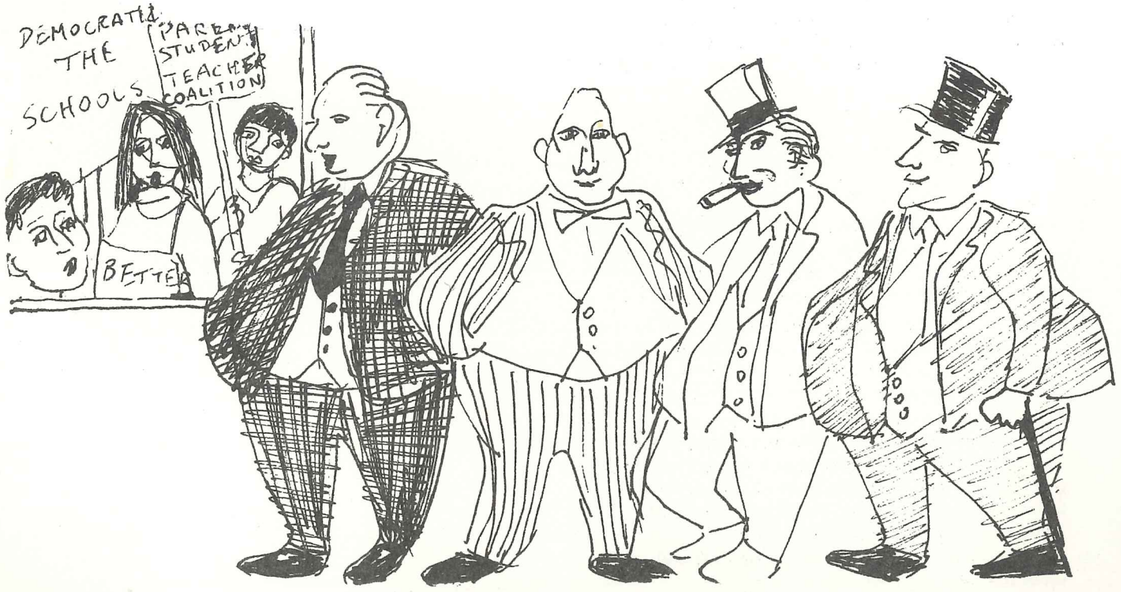
Nothing symbolizes the conditions of educational struggle in the 1960s more than President Johnson's "Great Society" progams. In New Haven, the 1960s were the years of innumerable Community Progress Inc. (CPI) programs, of a citywide network of community schools, of the ambitious Headstart and Headstart Follow-Through programs, of the Hill Arts Cooperative, the High School in the Community, and so on. Public education in New Haven did, for a while, enjoy the funding and the freedom to respond in part to working class demands for its goals to become part of educational policy.

However, it has turned out to be a short while. The 1970s were years in which the continuing struggle over public education tilted back towards the goals of the propertied class. Moreover, the capitalist class in the 1970s faced changed economic, political, and cultural conditions which led it to emphasize certain of its goals over others. The propertied class in the 1970s moved with increasing intensity to cut, to reduce and to control public education—in a word, to undo what the working class had accomplished during the struggles of the 1960s.

The current crisis in public education is the result of the ebb and flow of struggles over public education in the 1960s and 1970s. Right now, the crisis follows from the so far successful campaign of the propertied class to achieve its goals for public education. In our view, the following factors contribute to this campaign:

1. **The end of the Vietnam War and the decreased activity of the 1960s sharply reduced the need for trained workers in general and for the "Great Society" type workers in particular.**
2. **The competition of major U.S. corporations with other capitalists in Europe and Japan reached a point whether the U.S. corporations determined to improve their competitiveness by raising their profit rate "at home." To accomplish this, they are trying two main strategies. First, they continue to urge a massive cut in public services. Second,they continue to fuel inflation by increasing prices far in excess of wages. Lower taxes (through reduced public services) and lower wages (through inflation) yield higher profits!**

The propertied class' campaigns to reduce the public service sector includes the large public education component of that sector. In New Haven as elsewhere, school funding is drastically cut. There is talk of cutting out frills, of back to basics, of education limited strictly to vocational training, of making sacrifices. CPI is gone and mayors boast about their "no fat" budgets. Of course, all corporations know the value of public relations, of putting "creative advertising" to work to attain their goals. So the campaign to cut public services is "sold to the public as "tax relief." The working class anger at its tax burdens is used to enlist working class people in the corporate campaign to cut and to change public education.



The "Solutions" of the 1970's

Faced increasingly across the 1970s with a public education system whose funding and quality tilt more and more toward the propertied class' goals—faced with two political parties which are both uninterested in and incapable of organzing mass discontent—faced with their own long education in seeing social probles as personal probles with personal solutions—American workers are resorting to private, individual "solutions." Those who can afford it shift their children to private schools. There, they pay in fees far more than any tax savings realized by the cut in funding public education. But the propertied class is satisfied: the shift to private schools means that workers pay a greater share of the costs of education which has always been a priority goal of the propertied class.

Those who cannot shift to private schools are left in public institutions. While a minority of New Haven families are on welfare, 73 percent of the city's public high school students are children of welfare recipients. Added problems for public schools combine with reduced funding to make for a snowball effect: schools become community scandals further eroding public support. Teachers, parents, students, administrators struggle, often against each other, with the sinking feeling of being joined together in a sinking ship.

We can now be more exact and more accurate in speaking about a "crisis" in public education. It is a crisis for us, for the mass of Americans, because our educational goals are not being realized and are in danger of being neglected altogether. There is no crisis for the propertied class. It is successfully scaling down public education, reversing our goals in the 1960s. Liberals in the propertied class worry a little that the cut backs may be too much too fast, but they offer no effective resistance to our crisis. Such resistance could only come fromt he working class itself.

AIM believes that the crisis of public education is destructive and dangerous for America's working people. It is widening the gap between the rich and poor while it weakens the working class in its strugges with the propertied class over the future of the nation. AIM does not believe that private schools are or could be the solution. They are by definition disinterested in empowering the mass of Americans. They will not teach children of the mass of Americans respect for their past and their future as a group. Private schools cannot even be an alterantive training source because their cost is prohobitive. Workers who cannot afford private schools are forced to send their children to public schools that offer less and less. As a result, more and more children *actually* drop out of school or "drop out" even though technically still enrolled. Furthermore, schools become the arenas in which wider social problems are fought. As good jobs at the bottom become scarce, people without training to unite and fight together, fight each other along racial lines. The rightful demands of blacks and Hispanics for equal education become fights against whites over the reduced educational resources.

What Can Be Done?

AIM proposes that a coalition to save our schools be established. Its goals should be to restore full educational funding immediately while working over the longer run to meet the basic educational objectives of the mass of Americans. The groups belonging in such a coalition would be: unions, teachers, parents, students, community and civic groups, an progressive political organizations. Such a coalition could unite around the following platform:

1. **The guarantee of free public education for all Americans from cradle to grave, day care through adult education.**
2. **Tax reform to ensure that the whole burden for supporting public education rests upon those most able to pay. In Connecticut, that would mean such reforms as progressive wealth and income taxes in place of regressive sales, home and automobile taxes now in effect.**
3. **Tax reform requiring that public schools be financed by state or federal taxes rather than local taxes. In Connecticut that would mean full-state funding in place of highly regressive local real property taxes. The *Horton vs. Meskill* case has already prepared the basis for accomplishing this reform, although much more pressure needs to be applied.**
4. **An elected, paid Board of Education for the City of New Haven as a means to make public educational funding and policies more accountable to working people's educational needs and goals.**
5. **Elimination of all social, political and economic incentives for private schools.**
6. **Democratization of the schools with teachers, parents, administrators and, where appropriate, students given an equal say in making educational policy.**
7. **Decentralization of educational policy-making to provide the greatest latitude for style and technique in curriculum development while supporting the general goals of public education. The point here would be to give parents a choice among truly different public schools.**
8. **Curriculum changes to ensure that schools teach from the viewpoint of those who do the work in American society. This would include, for example, the history of American working people, paid and unpaid, and they systematic study of the people and organizations who built this country, raised its children, and carried on the complex struggles with the propertied class that have shaped our society.**

   Such curriculum changes should be cross-cultural, without stereotyping on account of sex, race, creed or national origin. All types of working people should find their history and conditions as topics within the curriculum: rural as well as urban workers, workers in the home as well as those in factories, offices and farms, slaves as well as wage earners and self-employed professionals, etc.
9. **The guarantee of learning all basic literacy and mathematical skills as well as the skills not now taught such as: how to organize to get what you want, how to work together for common goals, how to make decisions with others, etc.**
10. **General school orientation towards both job training and love of learning in the sense of non-job aspects of life such as art, physical agility, music, philosophy, crafts, etc.**
11. **Recognition of all styles of intelligence and the cultivation of the intelligence of each child, whether that talent is expressed verbally, mechanically, in movement, etc. Respect for all talents. A moritorium on all intelligence testing.**
12. **Full citizenship rights for all school employees and students, guaranteeing full choice of political, intellectual, and economic activities and full personal security.**
13. **Released time or paid time given to parents to allow and to encourage their full participation in the education of their children.**
14. **Full coordination of all social services involving school children and their families, i.e., if a child has a social worker, counselor, etc., that person works with the school.**

The American Independent Movement

The American Independent Movement (AIM) is a New Haven socialist organization that has been working since 1966 to get working people together to improve the quality of life for residents in this city. This struggle to improve living and working conditions is against the vested interests that run this city and the whole country.

We want everyone to have good housing, a good education, quality child care, recreation areas, quality health care and socially useful jobs.

AIM has run candidates for public office, been active in community and labor affairs and published a bi-weekly newspaper (*Modern Times*).

AIM believes that the times demand such a platform and such a coalition to save and to revive our public schools. Just as our ancesters had to struggle to establish a public school system, it is now our turn to struggle together for high quality and universal public education for our children and our children's children. □

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